



# EXPLANATION OF EMERSON'S HAMATREYA

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## ABSTRACT

*The Sage of concord, the American transcendentalist, R. W. Emerson known for his Philosophical and Literary writing . Emerson had developed strong passion in the Hindu's scriptures during his Harvard days. He started reading Vedantic Philosophy in 1840's, and continued throughout his life. Emerson's prose and poetry filled with Vedantic quotations. Emerson borrowed themes from Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures for his essays. The Philosopher and Over soul , spiritual law and etc. Best examples of Emerson essays which echoes the Vedantic ideology. The titles of few poems like Hamatreya, Bramha and etc, are borrowed from hindu scriptures. Emerson used Upanishadic concepts as a themes of his poems such as wood notes , the celestial love, sphinx and sprit. The objective of this present study is to interpret Emerson's poem Hamatreya and contend contrary to the observations of Emersonian critics in explaining the meaning of the title Hamatreya.*

**Key words:** Philosophical—Scriptures—Vedantic—Upanishads—Echoes.

## INTRODUCTION

Emerson the profounder of American transcendentalism can be called as poet among philosophers and a philosopher among poets. The centre idea of Emerson's philosophy of life authenticity of intuition and genuine emotion is in a sense, a poetic view of life. As a theorist of aesthetic experience, Emerson always highlighted poetic inspiration and gave least importance to poetic techniques. According to Emerson the poet is a seer and a visionary, But not a mere craftsman. For him "It is not meter, Rhyme which makes a poem beautiful but argument in poem.

Expression is the centre idea of Emerson's concept of poetic communication. All we need expression not knowledge, but power to express nothing more than that to produce beautiful

**B. S. S. BHAGAVAN**

1Page



poem. Emerson strongly believed that expression is the key to create a poem. It is only through expression that man can achieve ultimate self – realization. Emerson further says his concept of expression as an activity that seeks consummation only through complete freedom of thought and emotion any authority and dogma cannot dominate or influence the true expression the poets intellect which is free from all influences with the help of the celestial light produces beautiful poem. According to Emerson “The poets are liberating gods. They are free and they make us free.

Emerson believed that poetry comes into being as the result of Inspiration. While creating poem the poet sees the very essence of things though the poet makes the unseen things visible by means of true language. But he makes this without his conscious. So the poet is unconscious creator. Poetry is a spiritual activity thus it forms a link between visible and invisible world.

Emerson’s interest in the sacred writings of the east probably began during his Harvard days and continued throughout his life. He studies Manu, Vishnupurana the Bhagavadth - Gita, and Katha Upanishad there are number of references from these scriptures in his works.

There are many ideological similarities among oriental literature, the neo-platonic doctrines, Christian mysticism and the philosophy of the German idealists. Though the transcendentalists well versed in the above mentioned ideologists. The most striking parallels between transcendentalist writing and oriental thought make it clear that there was a spiritual kingship.”

(The vedantic concepts such as fundamental unity and Bramha can be seen in Emerson’s essay’s Plato; or the philosopher and the over soul”.

Emerson was the first great American who established his command over Hindu scriptures he found effinity between his and vedantic ideas. He regarded the Vedas as sublime, Sublime as heat and light breathless ocean.

The Vedas for him were books of all knowledge, the repositories of knowledge and wisdom. His belief in the transmigration of the soul, his belief in fate, and in the essential unity of Atma and Brahma and in Maya and Karama, all show the influence of Hindu philosophy.

The influence of Hindu vedantic philosophy can be seen in Emerson’s poetry. Emerson borrowed a number of themes and titles from the Hindu scriptures. For instance, “Bhrama” comes from the Upanishads, and “Hamatreya” from the Vishnu Purana vedantic philosophy inspired Emerson to write some of his poems such as wood notes, the celestial love; sphinx and spirits.



Emerson Assimilated Indian and western knowledge philosophy and in his poetry there is ever an effort to achieve a synthesis of the east and the west through poetry. He is ever trying to synthesise the values of the old and the new world. The integration of western and eastern philosophy only the way to achieve perfection and Emerson tried this throughout his life.

### **Hamatreya**

This exquisite lyric was first published in 1847. Later it was included in the selected poems 1876. Its title is derived. From Vishnupurana and it is a shortened form of “Hail Maitraya. It is a celebration of the greatness and glory of mother earth. Mother earth or nature is all powerful. None can possess her but all are ultimately possessed by her.

### **An Explanation of Emerson’s title “ Hamatreya”**

The title of the poem “Hamatreya” has puzzled Emerson’s critics. Carpenter could find no reason “why Emerson changed the name in his title from “ Maitreya” to “ Hamatreya” (Emerson and Asia, part. 127). Christy similarly observes that “the word Hamatreya has confused scholars. There seems to be no such word in the Hindu vocabulary, and the only explanation is that it is a form of the word Maitreya, the name of a character in the Vishnupurana” (The orient in American transcendentalism page no:356. Richard Bridgman in his article “The meaning of Emerson’s title ‘ Hamatreya’ (Emerson Society Quarterly No. 27, 2<sup>nd</sup> quart. 1962, P. 16). Guesses it is Greek; but the assignation of a Greek title to a poem which has its source in a Sanskrit work does not seem very appropriate. I, however, venture to contend, contrary to Christy’s observation, that “**Hamatreya**” is a pure Sanskrit expression. In **Hamatreya** is a Sanskrit word which has the same meaning as “ hey” in English. It denotes a mode of addressing a person to call his attention.

Thus “Ha” in the title “ Ha – Matreya” has apostrophic significance. The title to some intent evokes the atmosphere of seminary (ashram) in ancient India, which in the Indian mind is associated with the scene of a dialogue between a teacher and his disciple over matters of spiritual and philosophical import. The title “Hamatreya” thus suggests that the contents of the poem are being addressed by a sage named Parashara to his disciple Maitreya in response to the latter’s inquiry about the real worth of earthly possessions from the angle of a spiritualist. The title thus comes to signify. “**Oh Maitreya**; listen carefully to when I am going to say for this is a matter of great importance \In his concluding remarks in the original version of the poem the sage once again draws the attention of the disciple to the importance of the discourse imparted through the earth – song; “ these are the verses, Maitreya” he apostrophizes, “ which earth recited, and by listening to which ambition fades away like snow before the sun “ (The Vishnupurana Part, 392). Emerson through his title has



successfully captured the flavour of the original version of Parashara's discourse to Maitreya. Emerson's changing of the original "Maitreya". To "Matreya" in the title "Ha – Matreya" does not seem to me to have any significant implication beyond the his preference in the matter.

It, however, was not unusual for Emerson to use a Sanskrit title for his poem. He seems to have been fond of using Sanskrit words every now and then. Which tempts one to think that he may have had a smattering of Sanskrit, or as he calls it, the "ancient language of the Brahmins". (The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, III, 288). He quite often uses Sanskrit words like Maya, Brahma, Indra and Vishnu which, of course, can be easily picked up by anyone interested in the vedantic thought, but there are other Sanskrit words used by him which indicate a conscious effort on his part to become familiar with the Sanskrit language. He uses the Sanskrit word "Shanster" for scriptures (Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, IV, 428). Muni for a thinker (Dial, III, 331) Dharma Sastra in a collective sense for a "Body of Law" (Ibid). Atman for the individual soul and Paramatman for the universal soul. (The Complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, VI, 426). He knew that the Sanskrit word for wind was "Marut" and for fire "Agni" (The Complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, XII, 148, 149). In the poem "Initial, Daemonic and celestial love" he uses the Sanskrit word "pudit" in the expression "a pundit of the east". (The Complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, IX, 107). And at some other place he mentions "Suras" and "Asuras", the Sanskrit words for gods and demons, and also refers to "Amreeta" which in Sanskrit means, as he himself explains, the "liquor of immortality". (The Complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, X, 546). Elsewhere he gives the impression that he was not unfamiliar with Sanskrit, characters. He states it is easier to decipher the arrow – head character, than to interpret these familiar sights" (The Complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, VIII, 22). A journal entry shows that Emerson absorbed the very word Sanskrit in his vocabulary and used it to convey the sense of mysterious lore often associated with the Sanskrit language because of its being the vehicle of mystical thought of ancient India. He observes that a person has to experience calamity "to construct the glossary which opens the Sanskrit of the world" (Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, V, 450). We also find him showing interest in Sanskrit as the etymological source of "the old names of God". He writes.

The new study of the Sanskrit has shown us the origin of the old names of God, ... Dyaus, Deus, Zeus, Zeupater, Jupiter, ...names of the sun, still recognizable through the modifications of our vernacular words, importing that the day is the divine power and manifestation, and indicating that those ancient men, in their attempts to express the supreme power of the universe, called him the day, and that this name was accepted by all the tribes. (The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, VII, 166-167).



The passage contains an unmistakable echo of Gagatri Mantra, or the vedic prayer to the sun, the vedic symbol of divine light, which is recorded in the Rig-Veda. The prayer reads. “we meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; may he inspire our intelligence The Hymns of the (Rig-Veda, 3.62. 10, B.U. 636). There is further reason to believe that the Sanskrit language was not without some attraction for him. In a journal entry he pays tribute to “the scholars of the Sanskrit” for “the wonderful illumination thrown on all history in our own day (Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson , X, 103). According to his daughter Ellen, he always cherished the company of those “knowing Sanskrit and all the Vedas and able to tell father all he wanted to know”. (Rusk, Life, Part, 397). When he told Max Muller in a letter of August 4, 1873 that he knew “no word of Sanskrit, except what I read in your page”. Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson was just being modest.

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